

Bethesda-by-the-Sea
549 North Lake Trail
Palm Beach
Palm Beach County
Florida

HABS No. FLA-222

HABS,
FLA,
50-PALM
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20243

BETHESDA-BY-THE-SEA

Location: 549 North Lake Trail, Palm Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida.

Present Owner: Paul Maddock, 545 North Lake Trail, Palm Beach.

Present Occupant: The building is in a continual state of restoration. The accessory wing was converted to an apartment and is rented. The main chapel or auditorium is nearly unchanged, and is mainly unused.

Significance: Deconsecrated 1925, this Episcopal Church with semi-detached windmill-like tower, has been a local landmark on Lake Worth since it was erected in 1895, the first permanent substantial church to be built in the Palm Beach area. It was used as a church when the only transportation was by boat on Lake Worth, or by bicycle trail along the shore. It is a good example of the Shingle style, reminiscent of the Richardsonian Romanesque, with its shingled arched porches, octagonal forms at each end, and the single-chamber interior with well-proportioned hammer-beam ceiling.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1895.
2. Architect: John H. Lee of New York.
3. Original and subsequent owners: It was built for and owned by the Episcopal Church, Missionary Jurisdiction, of South Florida, was later deconsecrated and sold, in 1925, to a private owner. It is now owned (1971) by Paul Maddock, owner also of the Henry Maddock House (Duck's Nest) (HABS No. FLA-220), also on North Lake Trail.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not known.
5. Original plan and construction: The building is basically in its original condition, with only minor alterations. The structure consists of the main church hall, with an octagonal rotunda attached at one corner, complimenting the tower at the other. The octagonal rotunda is attached to the main hall by an arched loggia to the northwest corner; the loggia runs along the west, making up the main entrance to the tower on the southwest corner. The south side was made up of the continuation of the open loggia running from the east to the west.

The tower was originally the rector's housing.

6. Alterations and additions: The clock in the tower was added in 1907, a gift of Charles I. Cragin. Inside the clock is an inscription reading, "December 22, 1906, SETH THOMAS #1400."

The loggia along the south has been glass-enclosed to serve as part of the present apartment, which includes all but the main hall. A deep octagonal bay addition was also added to the south loggia along with an exterior spiral staircase.

The tower's lower room has had large windows added on all sides. The original had only three or four small narrow windows.

The tower cross has been replaced by a compass indicator.

The octagonal rotunda has also been glassed in as part of the present apartment.

The window in the back of the sanctuary was removed to a newly built church (completed 1928, South County Road) sometime between 1925 and 1928.

A more recent addition is the partition between the auditorium and the former chancel.

The planting of the grounds before 1925 consisted mainly of coconut palms in an extensive lawn. There is now luxuriant tropical growth, including hibiscus, croton, and several other varieties of palm.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The deconsecrated Episcopal Church of Bethesda-by-the-Sea was one of the first permanent church structures in Palm Beach. At the time the church was constructed it was the only church within a radius of 150 miles, and this was at a time before there were any roads. The church, although Episcopalian, was essentially non-sectarian, to satisfy and serve the diversified congregation. After the service on Sundays, members of the congregation usually remained on the grounds for a picnic. The weekly church meeting was a social event, as well, for the people who came across jungle and swamp to assemble here. The last service was held on Easter Sunday, April 12, 1925.

The Reverend Joseph N. Mulford began missionary work in the Lake Worth area in 1888. He came from Christ Church in Troy, New York. There was an earlier church building on this site erected in 1889: "A neat little church edifice was erected a short distance to the south of the present site." (Palm Beach Daily News, Jan. 21, 1902, p. 8.) (This structure, although greatly remodeled, is believed to be still standing a little to the southeast of the present building. The spire and some of the beams and the flooring are recent modifications.)

The main building of this now deconsecrated church was completed in 1895. One year later, on March 18, 1896, the church was consecrated by the Right Reverend William Crane Gray, D. D., Bishop of the Missionary Jurisdiction of South Florida, and the Right Reverend. E. Gardner Weed, D. D., Bishop of Florida.

The Reverend J. N. Mulford resigned in 1899, and was succeeded by the Reverend L. F. S. Hindry. The Reverend Mulford was again made rector from 1903 to 1909.

The last service was held on Easter Sunday, April 12, 1925. Subsequently the church was deconsecrated and sold to a private owner. It is now in the possession of Paul Maddock.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Interview with Paul Maddock, 545 N. Lake Trail, Palm Beach.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Palm Beach and West Palm Beach, The Artograph. Originated, published, and copyrighted 1926 by Long and Murdock, West Palm Beach, Florida. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Albortype Company, pre-1925. From Palm Beach, Palm Beach Life, March 27, 1956. [Old Views.]

Palm Beach Daily News, Historical Edition, 1966. (Reprint). [Old Views.]

Palm Beach News, Souvenir Number, 1903. [Old Views.]

Hoffstot, Barbara D., Landmark Architecture of Palm Beach. Pittsburgh: Ober Park Associates, Inc., Copyright Mrs. Henry P. Hoffstot, 1974. p. 32.

Prepared by: Bryan Bowman
Student Historian
University of Florida

Prof. Woodrow W. Wilkins
Dept. of Architecture
University of Miami
Project Supervisor
Summer 1971

PART II, ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This well-proportioned, now deconsecrated Episcopal Church and its windmill-like semi-detached tower is a good example of the Shingle style, and reminiscent of Richardsonian Romanesque with its shingled arched porches and octagonal forms at each end. The single chamber auditorium on the interior has a notable hammerbeam ceiling. The structure has been a local landmark since it was built.
2. Condition of fabric: Good. The structure has been subject to constant care and limited restoration by its present owner.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: None recorded.
2. Foundations: Brick piers.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: All wall surfaces, including those of the arched porches, the dormers, and the tower, are of weathered cypress shakes, trimmed in Venetian red paint.
4. Structural system, framing: Wood framing with hammerbeams and wood purlins.
5. Porches, rotunda, tower:
 - a. The original east and west porches have been altered by glazed enclosures of the northwest octagonal rotunda and the south porch. The west porch, set between the low rotunda on the north and the tower on the south, is divided into three wide-arched bays springing from rectangular piers which are shingled on all surfaces. The intrados of the arches are flush white-painted wood. The two end bays have a cross-rail panel balustrade. Wood steps, four risers high, located in the middle bay, are flanked by cross-rail panel balustrades or hand rails and by shingled pedestals supporting large pottery planters. The porch floor is of wood. The ceiling is beaded, vee-joint, tongue-and-groove. All bays of the south porch are now glazed in the arched opening except at the east end, which is screened. Wood steps are located at the east end of this bay. A large-scale quarter-round molding is applied to the wall at the ceiling. There are wrought-iron open-cage hurricane lamps on the wall.

- b. Northwest rotunda: This one-story octagonal rotunda, formerly open, is now enclosed, and used as part of the apartment in the converted south porch. The piers and arches are shingled, and painted. Five of the openings have been glazed with single-hung windows with fan transoms.
 - c. Tower: At the southwest corner of the porch is a three-story semi-detached tower, shingled with cypress shakes up to the belfry level. The proportions of this fine tower with its slightly battered walls and graceful pagoda-type roof create an impression of stability. This is further enhanced by the proportions and scale of the belfry framed at each angle of the octagon with short, thick, modified Tuscan columns and semi-enclosed on the faces by wide shingled louvers, approximately 30" deep. The wallfaces, on the four cardinal compass points, have large, approximately 8'-0" diameter, filigreed faces just below the base of the belfry. Inside is the original, weight-driven Seth Thomas pendulum clock. There is no cornice except the heavy lintels at the base of the openings. The pagoda-type roof rises from the wide overhanging eaves with false exposed rafters. The soffit is painted white.
6. Chimneys: There is a brick chimney on the north wall of the enclosed rotunda.
7. Openings:
- a. Doorways and doors: The entrance doorway on the west porch consists of solid, double, wood doors, 3'-3-3/4" x 7"-3-1/2" x 2-1/4" each. The transom above, 2'-7" x 10", contains leaded stained glass in a diamond pattern surrounding a central oval. Each door contains two panels. The simply molded trim is painted Venetian red.
 - b. Windows: The original windows are one type, occurring in grouped pairs on the west wall, and in groups of three on the north and south walls. These are wood, single-hung, with each sash measuring approximately 2'-0" x 3'-0", containing leaded stained glass. In the lower sash, the pattern is of elongated hexagons, 3-3/4" x 20", bordered by rectangles on the sides and bottom, and diamonds on the top. The upper fixed sash has a field of diamond pattern around a central oval, 9" x 15", except on the north and south windows where a cross replaces the oval in the center window of each set. There are also dormer windows in each north and south bay. They are single-hung, operated by ropes. Each sash is 1'-9" x 2'-2", leaded, with stained glass.

The axial east window in the chancel was a Palladian opening, now glazed in amber glass and interrupted by the dropped ceiling of a room which is part of the apartment now occupying the south porch. The original windows that were in this opening are now located in the new Bethesda-by-the-Sea on South County Road.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The auditorium roof is gabled, with cypress shakes covering, and wide overhanging eaves. The roofs over the porches are flat, built-up. The octagonal rotunda and octagonal tower have hipped roofs with cypress shakes.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The cornice at the roof is a single flat member. All eaves have exposed rafters.
- c. Dormers: There are three dormers in each slope of the auditorium, one in each bay.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The Church is composed of an auditorium, east or central chancel, southwest clock tower, south service wing, and northwest rotunda. The auditorium is three bays deep. On the chancel right is the choir, and on the chancel left is the pulpit. A porch connects the northwest rotunda with the auditorium entrance and the south wing. The rotunda is octagonal with exposed rafters on the interior.

The south wing accessory rooms have been turned into an apartment. The apartment is entered through the porch and includes the first floor of the clock tower which is used as a bedroom now.

2. First floor:

- a. Auditorium: All walls are beaded, tongue-and-groove boards, varnished, over a plain baseboard. Floors are varnished heart-pine planks. The rectangular chancel alcove between two sacristies on the east end has a barrel-vaulted ceiling in wood. The ceiling bays are defined by hammer beams with those at the ends exposed at the end walls. Longitudinal support is furnished by wood arches framing into the arched brace of the trusses. Varnished beaded ceiling boards span the area between the trusses. The interstices of the main trusses are filled with lancet bar tracery with trefoil cusps. This tracery occurs above the collar beam, between the principal rafters and the hammer beam, and between the hammer beam and the brace. Each hammer beam terminates in a carved wood pendant.

Iron tie-rods are decorated at the center by filigreed iron circles from which polished brass chandeliers are suspended. (According to Paul Maddock, the present owner, these chandeliers were once in the famous Bradley Casino in Palm Beach.) Large wood purlins frame into the principal rafters of the trusses. In the northeast corner of the auditorium is the wood-paneled choir stall placed in front of the northeast sacristy. Miniature columns and arches mark the railing into panels. Interior trim at the openings is a large-scale convex molding. High on the west wall, an arched opening which may have been a window or a niche is now sealed with beaded vertical boards.

b. Northwest rotunda: Here the floors are carpeted for its use as an apartment. A fireplace has been installed on the north wall. It is faced with marble, framed by fluted wood pilasters which support the wood mantel. The hearth is also marble. The remaining opening has been fitted with a built-in bookcase, and an air-conditioning unit behind a cabinet door.

3. Clock tower: The first level is now a bedroom, the second level houses the works of the Seth Thomas clock, and the third level is a reverberation chamber with three cypress shake louvers per bay.

D. Site and surroundings:

1. Setting: The church faces Lake Worth on the west, and is separated from it by Lake Trail. A concrete walk leads across the sloping lawn from the church to the trail. Vehicular access from Lake Way on the east is by an asphalt drive leading to a rectangular parking area shared with the Maddock residence on the south. A concrete walk leads from the parking lot to the east end of the former south porch which has been converted into an apartment. On the north property line a chain-link fence separates the property from one of the oldest existing houses in Palm Beach, the Henry Maddock House or Duck's Nest (FLA-220). Luxuriant tropical growth including hibiscus, croton, and several varieties of palms surround the property, except on the west lawn, which is relatively open to the lake.

2. Outbuildings: None.

Prepared by: Prof. Woodrow W. Wilkins, AIA and
Dept. of Architecture
Project Supervisor
Summer 1971

Richard C. Crisson
Architect
University of Florida

Richard High
Student Architect
Georgia Institute of
Technology

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Florida project to survey the historic architecture of Palm Beach and to emphasize written historical and architectural data was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Historical Society of Palm Beach County and the Florida Board of Archives and History in the summer of 1971. Under the direction of James C. Massey, then Chief of HABS, the project was carried out in the Historic American Buildings Survey field office in the Flagler Museum, Whitehall Way, Palm Beach, with Professor Woodrow W. Wilkins, AIA (University of Miami) Project Supervisor; Richard C. Crisson, Architect (University of Florida); Richard High, Student Architect (Georgia Institute of Technology); and Bryan Bowman, Student Historian (University of Florida). Under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS after March 1972, additional documentation was prepared and archival photographs for the project were taken in April 1972 by Jack E. Boucher, HABS photographer. Editing and final preparation of the documentation was carried out in 1980 in the HABS Washington office by Lucy Pope Wheeler of the HABS professional staff.

#